

# **DNR Secretary Scott Hassett**

## **Merrill Rotary Club**

### **October 7, 2003**

- I am pleased to be in Merrill, which I believe is north of the Tension Line. Madison is south of that line and it has been reported that there is some tension down there. Nevertheless, I enjoy my job as DNR Secretary. This job has been my dream and I am there for the long haul.
- My theme today is how the Doyle Administration is moving toward what the press is calling "The New DNR." As you will learn, I am striving for a new DNR culture that is based on mutual respect and concrete results. In these economic and political times, such a task is not just wise; it is an imperative.
- The press also says that if Jim Doyle changed DNR culture it would be like Nixon going to China. That is because a Democratic administration would have accomplished something that few persons expected it to accomplish but many people thought was necessary. My talk today will describe the attributes of the New DNR, what success could look like in that organization and conclude with a request for the time do it and your support to get it done.
- My remarks should be of interest to the many citizens who are affected by DNR. And they are of interest to DNR employees themselves. I care deeply for those employees and the Department's mission. This is why I have chosen my words carefully and why I will read my text.
- As you know, I'm an outsider in DNR. I did not come up through the ranks. I have a fresh pair of eyes. I try to ask probing questions and listen carefully. That comes from my training as a journalist and attorney. I also am a results-oriented person, and I have a mandate from the Governor to lead change in the DNR.
- In my brief time as Secretary, I have listened to and learned from many dedicated DNR employees. The efforts of these employees and those before them have produced impressive environmental progress. The water and air are cleaner because DNR employees implemented the laws and diligently pursued our mission.
- I also have listened to citizens, legislators, business persons and local officials. These people tell me that they also have done much for the environment and want to do even more, if given encouragement and support from DNR. Governor Doyle has been listening, too, and shared what he has heard. This has helped me understand what must be done.
- Today I will announce what will be a joy to mischievous headline writers throughout Wisconsin. I call them the Doyle Administration's "Four A's for the New DNR." The four A's are: Awareness, Attitude, Action and Accountability.
- These words are my simple and direct signals to citizens and employees. From these words will come the norms that form the culture and the efforts that produce results on my watch as DNR Secretary.
- I want these Four A's to be positive signals. This is because the Governor and I care about the DNR, its mission and its health. We care about DNR employees

and their self-image. We want the agency and its employees to achieve their potential, to fulfill the laws and to be respected by the citizens of this great state.

- However, absent these new signals and will to act, we fear that the DNR will lose even more resources AND the public support necessary to fulfill its mission. In fact, even some of our defenders in the Legislature warn me of this and their warnings have become more urgent in recent weeks. If it refuses to change, DNR risks being at the margins of its mission, not its core. The clock is ticking.
- I am enough of a realist to know that some will not receive this message positively. Some may be DNR employees. Others will be from the outside. Still others may complain that it is not enough or fast enough. I will listen to this criticism and adjust as warranted. But after listening and observing for these past months, I am sure of myself. We have set the course. And when I say "listening" I want to give you a sense of how much I have been out of the office. I checked my schedule and I have been out of Madison 103 days this year, with 36 overnights. No one can say that I am running things out of Madison and oblivious to the needs and problems of the rest of the state.
- And so I will explain my "Four A's" and how they will affect who we are and how we act as public servants.
- The first "A" is for Awareness. The New DNR will be aware of the world outside its walls and relate to the people who live in that world. We will re-connect with their lives. We will understand their hopes, fears and priorities. We will be their neighbors with new understanding.
- I have heard again and again that DNR is insulated from the world that others live in. As a result, I have heard that our personal contacts appear heartless and our decisions disconnected from real needs. That perception must change. If the perception is true, the reality must change as well.
- To make it happen, DNR employees will walk in someone else's shoes. If there are workers that fear for their jobs, their families and their future, DNR workers must feel that fear. If there are businesses that have lost orders to China, DNR employees must sense that loss. We must hear these stories and put faces on each of them. And when that happens, the experience will make us better public servants and more sensitive human beings.
- Within 90 days, I will announce a focused, low-key and low-cost exercise called "Face-to-Face." We are short of money but we will not be short of empathy. After the announcement, we will sit in your offices, visit your shops, stop at your factories and walk in your shoes. We will focus on YOUR issues, not ours. This will be at your invitation. We will be your guests. I will take the lead and I assure you that others will follow from each of our programs and each of our offices. No program will be exempt.
- After we have listened, my top managers and I will review those stories to help us be better leaders and make better decisions. And I want at least 100 stories that are rich in meaning. Then my leadership team will insist that these stories, from your places of work and in your words, be retold in our places of work to help us better appreciate who you are and what you do to create jobs and opportunity in our state.

- The second "A" is for Attitude. The New DNR will be known for its respect of others not its attitude toward others. As a lifetime sportsman, I can say that I have never encountered a DNR employee who was discourteous to me. And I support the vast majority of employees who deal with citizens in a respectful, helpful and courteous fashion. But as with any organization of more than 2,500 workers, there will be times when employees have a bad day and are unprofessional. It may be that the actions or attitudes are of a bad employee. Or perhaps a good employee having a bad day.
- Unfortunately, those negative examples are what people remember and now they seem to define our organization. These stories about discourteous, abrupt, condescending or even contemptuous treatment are told and retold. You have heard them. And I have heard about them from businesses, legislators, citizens and even other DNR employees.
- Good DNR employees are painted with the bad brush of others' behavior and some of these employees have told me that that want it to stop. Although limited, these attitudes and stories are killing the DNR in the Legislature and with the public. They must end.
- Within 90 days, I will announce a system whereby any citizen can contact my office to complain about a DNR employee's behavior or attitude. Before the announcement, I will communicate clearly and firmly to employees about the business-like behavior that will be the norm. This new norm will help define the culture. There will be negative consequences for employees who don't get it; there will be benefits for employees who exemplify the new culture.
- As you can appreciate, such a system must be user-friendly, thorough, effective and enduring. It must provide safeguards for those who complain and fairness for those who are the subject of the complaints. And it must be credible. It will take some work to design. But it will meet all of those criteria and be in place as long as I am secretary.
- Some businesses might be skeptical and say they have heard it before. They fear DNR employees will simply smile when they say "Do it my way or else." I can tell you that I am not talking about a smiley face that masks a contemptible attitude. I am talking about fundamental change in how we think, how we work and how we relate to others.
- If there is new information, we should want to hear it. If there is a better way, we should want to try it. The "Do it my way or else" attitude has got to go. We should be driven by results. Where the rules and procedures get in the way of results they may have to be changed as well.
- My employees will be accountable, but I have to say that I will also call out those who tell the unsubstantiated stories about the bad DNR. If I'm to hold my staff to a higher standard others need to know that I am no longer listening to the anecdotal stories without asking the tough questions. If you're making it up I'm going to find out. I used to be a journalist and the basic rule was to put who, what, when, where and why in the first paragraph. I will be looking for those kinds of details in the reports that I get.
- The third "A" is for Action. The New DNR will be measured by results not paperwork. Many have told me that DNR requires paperwork because we don't

trust businesses, farmers or landowners. It sometimes seems to me that we think paperwork will protect the environment. I believe results protect the environment. This is especially true in economic times like these when both government and business must be especially frugal. \

- The New DNR will favor results over control. We will let go where we can, especially with those businesses that have the strongest environmental records. We will find more efficient and effective ways to monitor and evaluate performance. That will allow us to re-focus on poor performers, higher priorities and greater risks.
- Action means promoting environmental innovation such as Governor Doyle's good actors' proposal that is contained in Grow Wisconsin, as well as the Legislature's Environmental Results concept. We will see innovation as an opportunity, not a threat and make it work for both the environment and economy.
- Action means real environmental permit reform and real deadlines to get permits out. New Source Review reform will be done in seven months. Comprehensive Air Permit streamlining will be in place next year. Immediate changes to streamlined permitting will start as soon as we find those opportunities.
- We will act immediately to implement permit application processing goals. I am unsure whether the Governor, Legislature or both will give us the goals. And it remains unresolved what form they will take. But whatever the case, there will be no DNR foot dragging. And I will pay special attention to helping small businesses because they are the ones most often frustrated and hurt by permit uncertainty and delay.
- The fact is that for businesses, time is money. Wisconsin businesses are in a race for survival and the DNR cannot cause costly delays. As you know, the permit problem has been festering for years. It did not start in the Doyle Administration. But it is going to be solved in this administration, with results that are there for you to see and the people to judge.
- The fourth "A" is for Accountability. The New DNR will be accountable to its mission and its public. I must, sadly, repeat a comment made by a journalist recently. He said that some people have the perception that DNR employees care more about themselves than the DNR's mission. I do not believe that to be true. But if that is the perception we must fight the perception with facts.
- First and foremost, we need an effective accountability system. The system will be guided by mission, driven by goals, measured by performance and designed to record and report the results we have achieved. It also will report when we fail to meet our goals and the reason for it. It will be a system used for accountability but also learning. Through it we will strive to make our best even better.
- Internally, my leadership team is working to institute a more effective management system that documents progress toward goals and where corrections are in order.
- Externally, we will have a DNR report card posted on the front page of the DNR web site so everyone - especially the business community- can follow our progress. The first two accountability report cards we create will be for regulatory reform and energy project reviews. Both of these priorities come from the Governor and both are a part of Grow Wisconsin.

- This part of our web site also will have an opportunity for feedback and questions.
- I would like to end on an upbeat note because I believe that the first step to solving any problem is to realize there is a problem. Recently, Secretary Nettles spoke to you and emphasized the importance we place on economic growth. Since then, the Governor has released Grow Wisconsin, a document that paid a lot of attention to DNR issues.
- On the matter of growth, I am here to say that the administration is of one mind and one purpose. Wisconsin must grow and the barriers to growth that can be removed must be removed. The state's regulatory climate and DNR are real and perceived barriers to growth. I am a part of the cabinet. I have my charge and we will succeed.
- So the question might be asked, what will success look like? Here are several examples:
  - Success will look like a business that works with us to eliminate 2,700 pages of DNR paperwork in one facility and saves one-and-a-half positions that process regulatory paperwork. As a result of the change the business provides DNR with more reliable information about the real environmental result that it has achieved.
  - Success will look like a business that wins a contract over Chinese competition because it had a regulatory bubble and didn't need DNR approval to shift a process.
  - Success will look like a business that can install new, environmental technology at the front end of the process, saving thousands of dollars, rather than through the stack controls that were required with old rules.
  - Success will look like the DNR and business cooperating to gain community approval for a facility expansion that neighbors once opposed.
  - And success will look like DNR leadership being a partner with the foundry, dairy and paper sectors in saving their jobs and making them more competitive by practical rules, a helpful culture, efficient permit processes and innovative policies.
- It may surprise you that these snapshots of success are happening now. One example is just north of here at the Packaging Corporation of America in Tomahawk. The success stories all come from regulatory reform initiatives managed by DNR employees in partnership with businesses.
- These businesses and our employees are pioneers in a new "we can" approach to economic and environmental success. This approach will provide an alternative to the "you can't" model we now practice. The pilot program is closed to new participants but it has proved its point.
- The DNR employees and businesses are aware of each other's needs and goals. They have an attitude of mutual respect. They are focused on actions and driven by results. And they hold each other accountable and expect the public to hold them accountable, too.
- So, if you ask me, I am optimistic. We have numerous employees who are eager to create the New DNR. We have concrete examples that better ways exist. And we have a Governor and Legislature focused on change.
- But change will be neither uniform nor easy in DNR. And it will require leadership, innovative tools and a culture of opportunity.

- You can help me provide that opportunity through constructive engagement and shared responsibility. That is because the employees do not own the DNR, we all do. And we all must help DNR through the storm to chart a new course and create a new culture. If it sinks in the storm, it is our ship, not theirs. This is a request for help that I already gave my Innovation Stakeholders Group.
- I know it will be difficult, but I am in it for the long haul and need your patience. But I also need your input, your feedback and your help. Thank you.